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AUTHOR Ayers, George E.
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ABSTRACT

Trends in higher education are sketched with attention directed to the role of the humanities and the community college sector. In light of declining enrollments, financial problems, and other bleak projections, it is suggested that fostering diversity is needed for continued vitality and productivity. Four areas of diversity of concern are: the composition of student bodies, variants in curriculum, new and creative teaching and learning styles, and a discerning difference between institutions. While the traditional age group of undergraduates is expected to decline, diverse student bodies of the elderly, minorities, and veterans may be recruited. In regard to diversity of curricula, it is suggested that core curriculum should be essential curricula and that careerism need not replace the humanities. Both types of programs can coexist. The need for planning and program evaluation from a highly content-oriented type of instruction to that which encompasses both content and process is also addressed. (SW)

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE 1980's*

George E. Ayers
President
Massasoit Community College
Brockton, Massachusetts

I am pleased to be here today and to be addressing this important conference of the Community College Humanities Association. For generations the humanities have held a vital, esteemed, and steadfast role in American higher education, yet for the past twenty years we have witnessed a marked erosion in that stature. This determination has become a major concern of leading educational associations over the past several years. In fact, the Association of American Colleges is focusing its efforts this year on promoting the value of liberal learning as an integral part of core curriculum. Your being here today is an indication of your concern for the future of the humanities in the decades to come.

As community college educators we must take partial blame for the decline in the humanities. A portion of what we seek to do, in particular, preparing students for meaningful work, has contributed to the rise of careerism so often labelled as the source of the humanities' ills. Yet, the problem goes beyond anything contrived by our educational institutions. After all, it was our responding to a societal need that brought about what some view as an excessive solution. People must still go to work, education must still offer relevancy in that pursuit. We are servants of those who come to us and, to serve well, we must anticipate. More than that, we must have the strength of our convictions. One major problem is that we have acquiesced to a passive role in these exceptionally active times.

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Educational journals and reports this year are replete with predictions for the eighties. Almost none contain a sense of bright promise and optimism. One need not look far to verify the bleak prospects outlined by the pessimists. Chief amongst their fears are a tightening of financial resources; declines in student enrollments, with an attendant fierce, and often times unscrupulous, competition for students; the increased need for financial support from state and federal governments, and the corresponding proliferation of regulations which accompany that support; the aging of a fixed group of faculty meaning less and less infusion of young talent on our faculties; the lowering of academic standards in order to attract the numbers necessary for economic survival; and institutional energy as we allow pessimism to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Will history afford of our mission essentially what it footnoted of the dodo dind: an extinct creature which flew in ever decreasing, concentric circles until it disappeared inside itself?

John F. Kennedy saw us in a similar predicament in 1963 and issued a plea then for unity in starting a campaign against the prevailing rampant tide of pessimism. Speaking before the graduating class of American University, he chose a popular World War I theme to make his point. "We can make the world safe for diversity", he said. And it is this phrase that I believe we must adopt as our rallying cry here on the threshhold of the eighties.

Diversity in a time of plenty is to be expected; diversity in a time of want becomes a challenge, and for education it is a challenge not like any we have known in recent times. We <u>can</u> make the world safe for diversity. In fact, it is the key to our continued productivity and our vitality. It is the task of our survival. But to get there from here requires change.

What was the state of education just prior to President Kennedy's statement? The nation had entered into the decade of the sixties

with much to be done regarding equal and open access to education, federal aid to students, and at least a numbers' response in programs and classroom space to accomodate the post World War II baby boom. But, as the Carnegie Commission po nts out, we knew little or nothing then about the social forces which would trouble that or of whom we would hold to account for a solution. Sputnik. The Civil Rights Movement. Vietnam. The Student Movement. The sixties brought about the beginning of change in the educational orbit. An important transformation had been effected whereby we became social guardians as well as educators. Our increased spheres of interest and influence would bring heady new highs but debilitating lows.

Where are we today? What problems confront us in our drive to diversity? First, of course, is the fact of dwindling traditional enrollments. No tickee, no laundry. Compounding matters for those of us concerned for the future of humanities' study is that the nontraditional student we must attract to remain viable as institutions too often look through concrete lenses. If it can't be touched, it can't have worth.

The Carnegie Enrollment Projections predicts a decline in traditional age-group undergraduate enrollments of at least 15 percent by 1997, provided some imponderables obtain such as increased female and minority participation, improved retention rates, and increased numbers of part-time students. This decline could approximate 23 percent on the same time span.

Marketing strategies to attract students assume an importance second to none in the furtherance of higher educational institutions. Inflation, a general scarcity of resources, diminishing marginal returns on those resources remaining all serve to enervate us. I am here today, however, to discuss primarily the other side of the equation: How ya goin' to keep 'em down on the farm, or what do we do with them once we get them? There

are four areas of diversity of fundamental concern to us community college educators as we enter the 80's: The composition of student bodies; variants in curriculum; new and creative teaching and learning styles; and, a discerning difference between institutions.

The decrease expected in traditional enrollments over the foreseeable, practical future is occasioned by a decrease nationwide in the 15-24 year old population. A 16.4 percent drop is seen for the country, with the two most populous New England States, Massachusetts and Connecticut, expected to experience decreases in this age bracket totalling 11.1 percent. Complicating matters is that, thought the largest New England State, Massachusetts, had a negative capacity to absorb new taxes as of 1975, the actual tax effort at that date had been increased substantially (-6 tax capacity index to +30 tax effort index). What does this mean? Quite simply, the graduate-from-high-school-go-to-college student is a diminishing breed and his natural replacement is often forced to think first of paying the rent, then of course selection. The diversity I think we will see on our campuses will be one whose common denominator, to an increasing degree, will be some form of subsidy - welfare recipients, the elderly, veterans, minorities. The open door admissions policy of the Massachusetts Board of Regional Community Colleges has hastened the mix in this state.

If our system is to survive, other progressive policies must be forthcoming. At this point is is near impossible to separate institutional diversity and survival. One thing is certain: to continue past practice into future efforts is to guarantee failure. We must re-examine our principles and develop a new set of images or goals around them. What role should the liberal arts play in the community college of tomorrow? What precisely is wrong with community colleges being

advanced trade schools? What impact would there be if every humanities course were to be dropped this moment? What type of student could we expect to enroll and how many of them? I am interested in your answers.

A second area we must consider is diversity of curriculum An empirical glance at the past twenty years is an accurate suggestor of the next twenty, provided we infuse no new life into our courses of study. One difficulty in assessing cores is that they are so far removed from the rind. One shouldn't have to perform major surgery simply to test for good health. We should be working together in developing non-invasive techniques that guarantee a general educational quality representative of a college's best efforts. Core curriculum should be essential curricula, where essential can be defined as something every educated person should possess. By no means does this dismiss the need to promote such programs as recreational leadership or developmental skills workshops. Indeed, life's greatest satisfactions belong to the man for all seasons. The rise of careerism and the new high technology need not herald a decline in the humanities. The legacy of this nation is private, liberal arts education. The overwhelming majority of laws which rule us and jobs which provide us sustenance were promulgated by people whose roots lay in that bedrock. A natural progression of need has brought forth a public response in education, and that need has seen further refinement in creation of the community college. The mantel, however, remains inviolate and all those who would wear it accept the responsibility to pass it along the better for that wear.

What sort of framework should we be thinking about as we prepare our curricula for the 1980's? We have achieved a measure of diversity in programming which has grown alongside the institutional missions of the community colleges and the populations we represent. As we look to the future, however, the most overriding and constant theme will be one of change. Our survival may depend on the way we respond to that change, learn from it, and find practical solutions to accomodate it.

Some programs will fall prey to governmental budget cutters. In many cases the realities of duplication and an abiding lack of students will force such drastic measures. Instead of letting some external agency prune our taxes, why not anticipate them? Why not cut the dead wood ourselves? Why? Because overt actions are too often deemed unconscienable. Better to suffer the slings and arrows of righteous indignation than to see any merit in other people's arguments.

Traditionally, education has mired itself in a system in which proposals have hung on for years literally before an outcome or consensus could be reached. This is a luxury which we can no longer afford. The first and foremost step in correcting and hastening curricular change will be a much needed long and short range planning mechanism which will greatly facilitate the gathering of data; program development and phase-out; the varieties of degree, certificate, and training needs; and a well-reasoned means for achieving quality assurance for all academic and non-academic offerings. We must become proficient at planning, making judgments about, and commitments to, the future, setting priorities, and determining how well we have met our goals. None of these ideas is particularly new, but for years education has failed to incorporate them.

My third area of concern is teaching and learning styles. These provide an illustration of the traditional resistance to change in education, but demonstrate that change is possible. If we scan the development of both teaching and learning styles in recent years we note a progression from a highly content-oriented type of instruction to a type of instruction encompassing both content and process. Consider the sheer numbers of instructional areas with which we must now contend: adult learning; cognitive and effective development; support systems for learning; individualized and team taught instruction; computer and media assisted instruction. The list is extensive.

The instructor finds himself in a maze of knowledge and technique with no clear indication of how best to proceed. Faced with this predicament, he often assumes the path of least resistance, the response that is no response at all. This same problem plagues administrators and students.

We must be careful not to sacrifice content for process in our quest for excellence. If we can't know everything there is to know, however, we must "organize our ignorance". The coming decade will redefine the limits of man's knowledge and his ability to assimilate, synthesize, and present that knowledge in a learning forum. I am afraid the passing grade on this test will be very high.

My focus has been primarily on the internal factors of higher education. I will make some observations about the internecine warfare between and among institutions themselves. To an increasing extent, state and local governments, as well as Washington, will be involved in the internal functioning of colleges. Their power to underwrite operating and program costs, provide student aid monies, license and accredit, appoint governing boards, etc., etc., makes these governmental units a troublesome fact of life. College presidents are only now becoming aware of the cumulative and precarious impact they will have on the future of higher education. What is needed is a cohesive lobbying effort at both the state and national levels: what has ensued is Armageddon. We must cultivate support for our elemental mission casting aside for at least the time being that innate desire to highlight our differences. Fratricide, my fellow colleagues, is suicide in todays market.

This is almost an elementary idea in community college education but one where past efforts have been ineffectual. Only lip service has been paid to the notion of a business/education linkage. In times of rapid change we must be able to

respond to fluctuating employment trends and gain support for our programs from the cultivation of meaningful industrial ties. Liberal arts and career education are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Still, it's intellegent, to go with the hot hand.

We must take care to preserve the institutional diversity we now possess. We must reorganize ourselves structurally, reallocate our financial and human resources where necessary in an efficient manner, and reorder our goals and priorities. But these tasks need to be accomplished within the framework of our unique situations. Institutional missions can be highly specialized within specific segments in higher education, and we must recognize that that right to diversify is as legitimate as any other.

The 80's may well signal an era where we will be faced with the prospect of a continued diminishment of the humanities as we know them. That may or may not be a terrible thing. I can tell you unequivocally, however, that the humanities as we cherish them will remain forever with me as a personal bounty and at my school as the succor of future generations.

Thank you.